



# MASINDE MULIRO UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CITATION ON

**FRANCIS ATWOLI**  
NOM (DZA) EBS, MBS

On Conferment upon him of the Honorary Degree  
of  
DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS (*Labour Relations*)  
*Honoris Causa*

By  
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

ON  
14TH DECEMBER, 2018

## **MOTTO**

The University of Choice

## **PHILOSOPHY**

MMUST upholds the view that education, science and technology are indispensable tools in harnessing resources of nature for sustainable development by creating an environment in which all individuals can realize their full potential.

## **VISION**

To be the Premier University in Science, Technology and Innovation

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

To provide excellent university education, training and research through integrating science, technology and innovation into quality programmes to suit the needs of a dynamic world.

## **CORE VALUES**

Customer Focus

Collegiality

Excellence

Professionalism

Equity

Accountability

Innovativeness

**DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS  
(LABOUR RELATIONS)**  
*Honoris Causa*



**FRANCIS ATWOLI  
NOM (DZA) EBS, MBS**

## EARLY YEARS AND FAMILY

Sixty nine years ago, Francis Atwoli was born to World War II veteran Livingstone Alubala Atwoli and Mary Machengo. As the eldest son of the couple, Francis spent his early years in Nairobi where his father worked as a driver after the war. At the age of six, his father sent him to his Kisa home area in Kakamega County to start primary schooling. Apart from gaining knowledge and skills, the tour of schooling was to meant to get young Atwoli to know his extended family as well as enable him to be fluent in the Luhya language. He was enrolled at Shiongo Primary School in 1955 where he sat for his Common Entrance Examinations after four years. He passed the examinations and transferred to Shirotisa Intermediate School where he sat for and also passed his Kenya African Preliminary Examinations (KAPE).

On completing his primary school education, Mr. Atwoli, a staunch Catholic, was admitted to St. Mary's Muthangari Secondary School in Nairobi. He learnt at this school for two years before transferring to St. Mary's Secondary School, Machakos due to student unrest at the Muthangari School. It is at the school in Machakos that he completed his secondary education. It is also at this school that Atwoli's zeal, vibrancy and commitment to fighting for others rights was born following a visit and lecture given to students by the veteran trade unionist, Tom Mboya. The lecture developed in him an inspiration and consciousness to be a champion for the rights of workers.

Mr. Atwoli is married and blessed with 45 children. Of these, 15 are his biological children while 30 are adopted ones. He is a strong believer in education and has ensured that all his children attain university education and are able to take charge of their lives and livelihoods. He also supports other needy students from all over the country by paying school fees for them. Currently, he is catering for 20 needy university students by meeting their fees and subsistence needs. A prolific seeker of knowledge,

Mr. Atwoli has finalized his Bachelor of Business Administration (Human Resource Management) degree at Cavendish University in Kampala, Uganda.

## ATWOLI THE TRADE UNIONIST

On the Labour Relations front, Mr. Atwoli has been forthright in his fight for the workers. His sojourn in the sector began immediately after his secondary education when he was employed by the East African Posts and Telecommunication Administration at the tender age of 18. His fellow colleagues discovered his leadership prowess and within two months of employment, he was elected unopposed as the Shop Steward for the Union of the Posts and Telecommunication Employees(UPTe(K)), Nairobi depot. The election birthed in Mr. Atwoli the zeal to fight for workers rights in an actual workplace setting. At 21 years of age, he was elected the Nairobi Branch Secretary of UPTe (K) after defeating several veteran trade unionists.

In order to sharpen his his trade union leadership skills, Mr. Atwoli was sponsored by the Central Organization of Trade Unions, Kenya( COTU(K)) through UPTe(K)to undertake labour studies at the prestigious Turin College of Labour Studies, Italy for six months . This sojourn to Italy helped to widen his scope and understanding of Trade Union issues. It also exposed him to the leadership of global trade union organizations. On his return to Kenya in the same year, he continued to lead trade union activities that with time resulted in his transfer to a less lucrative posting in Garissa to slow him down. He was later retired in public interest for involvement in union activities in 1986.

In the same year, his merited rise in trade union leadership catapulted him to the position of Director of Organization at COTU(K) headquarters following the election of Joseph J. Mugalla as COTU(K) Secretary General. This position thrust Mr. Atwoli into the national limelight in the labour movement. The new position also enabled him to benefit from a Scholarship that got him admitted to the George Meany Centre for Labour Studies in Maryland, USA for two years to study modern techniques in industrial relations practice. It is here under Prof. Mackenzie that Mr. Atwoli, then a militant trade unionist, learnt that “militancy without diplomacy and negotiation skills is useless.” This newly acquired philosophy has enabled him to navigate the labour relations terrain locally, regionally and globally by knowing when to apply negotiations and diplomacy and also when to apply militancy in the form of industrial action, including strikes. The study tour also deepened his knowledge, skills and understanding of organization in labour, trade union responsibility and collective bargaining based on economic dynamics, statistics and public relations.

Upon his return to Kenya in 1991, he continued serving as the Director of Organization at COTU(K) headquarters until 4th December 1994 when he was elected unopposed as the Secretary General of the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU). When Mr. Atwoli took over the wg the 1996 elections. Politically, he unsuccessfully tried his hand in parliamentary elections for Butere and Khwisero constituencies in 1992 and 1997 respectively before deciding to focus on trade union leadership locally and internationally.

Despite these political setbacks, delegates unanimously elected him unopposed as the Secretary General of COTU (K) in August 2001. He has since been reelected unopposed six times. Upon election as the Secretary General, he took the challenge and embarked on revolutionizing the COTU(K) to make it worker focused and one that approached negotiations on workers matters when prepared and armed with well researched facts on socio-economic issues. With the assistance of other Board members at COTU (K), Mr. Atwoli has succeeded in revolutionizing and reforming the umbrella organization of trade unions. Under his leadership, its membership has grown from 300,000 in 2001 to its current 2.5 million members.

In his position as the Secretary General, he has shown unparalleled forthrightness in advocating for workers’ rights across the different sectors of the economy and has engaged in initiatives that contribute to industrial peace as well as ensure that workers’ contribution to national development is recognized. To him, employers as owners of capital deserve a return on their investments. However, this should not be at the expense of workers. According to him, a worker must be given his due in the form of a fair wage in return for his labour, a decent workplace and attractive terms and conditions of employment. He therefore advocates for the social partners to ensure that whereas profits and productivity are critical goals to be pursued by the employer, workers rights ought to be protected. The workers’ sweat and input is the heart of the employers’ gains without which all these gains are eroded.

Since ascending to the pinnacle of the Trade Union movement in Kenya, Mr. Atwoli’s successes in labour relations matters include:

1. He has been in the forefront in defending workers’ rights in Kenya, regionally and globally through representation and advocacy to the extent that he has become the face of the trade union movement in Kenya.

2. He has pushed for and ensured that workers issues are given prominence and form part of the agenda in national discourses by being the workers' voice in such matters.
3. He championed for the inclusion of labour rights in the Bill of Rights under Article 41 of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. Under the independence Constitution, labour rights were not explicitly guaranteed by the Kenyan Supreme law. Mr Atwoli's push for their inclusion has constitutionally ensured that workers rights to fair labor practices and participation in industrial action is guaranteed.
4. He was the representative of workers during the Kenya Constitution making process that resulted in a new constitution in 2010. Here, he advocated for and ensured that the Industrial Court was elevated from being a Tribunal in the Ministry of Labour to its current status as the Employment and Labour Relations Court with equivalent status of the High Court of Kenya. Unlike previously where labour and employment related disputes took long to be adjudicated, this new judicial development has ensured that labour issues are heard and determined competently and expeditiously. His demand that this court be spread throughout the country was also implemented by the government.
5. He has also pushed for and succeeded in ensuring that Labour Laws protect and enhance workers' rights and welfare. This resulted in the enactment of improved **Core Labour Laws** in 2007 that were a major departure from the earlier labour laws that had existed since independence. These improved laws include the Employment Act, 2007, the Labor Relation Act 2007, Labor Institution Act 2007, Occupational Safety and Health Act 2007 and the Work Injury Benefits Act 2007.
6. He has also advocated for the Social Security of workers during their working life and after retirement. Through advocacy and participation as an influential workers' voice in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), he has ensured that workers social security benefits are secured and paid within the required period. The National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) has also improved its services to workers through enhanced medical support for out- patient and in- patient benefits courtesy of his advocacy and that of COTU( K) of which he is the spokesman.
7. He has also participated in **mentoring and training the Trade Union leaders** through various initiatives locally and internationally.
8. He has pushed for and from time to time encouraged negotiations for better terms and conditions of service of workers by encouraging collective bargaining initiatives between employers and employees. This has not only improved the workers welfare but also ensured that industrial peace prevails.
9. He has also participated in various development activities across the country such as fundraising meetings for schools and other learning institutions. During such events, he has been instrumental in advising the political elite on the socio- economic impact of their utterances and actions from a worker's perspective. This has made COTU (K) an alternative voice and organ for guidance on national issues.

In recognition of his efforts and for being the face of the labour movement, Mr. Francis Atwoli has been elected to several local, regional and global leadership positions relating to the labour sector such as:

1. General Secretary, **Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union (KPAWU)**
2. Secretary General, **Central Organization of Trade Unions( COTU(K))**
3. Chairman of the **East African Trade Union Confederation (E.A.T.U.C)** based in Arusha, Tanzania( 2002-2017)
4. President of the **Trade Union Federation of Eastern Africa (TUFEA)** based Khartoum, Sudan
5. President of the Pan African Labour movement, the **Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU)** based in Accra, Ghana
6. Vice President of the **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**, based in Brussels, Belgium.
7. President, **Global Industrial Relations Oversight Authority** based in Geneva, Switzerland.
8. Elected Titular Member of the **International Labour Organisation, (ILO)** governing board based in Geneva, Switzerland
9. Coordinator, **Africa and Asia Labour Issues** based in Geneva, Switzerland
10. Board Member of the **Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ILO)** in Turin, Italy
11. Appointed Member, **National Labour Board**, Kenya
12. Elected Director, **National Bank of Kenya**, Kenya
13. Trustee, **National Social Security Fund (NSSF)**, Kenya

Viewed as a champion of social justice in Africa and the world, Mr. Francis Atwoli has also been recognized and feted locally and internationally by Governments and trade union centres. To his credit, He has been awarded:

- a) The Elder of the Burning Spear (EBS) by the Government of Kenya
- b) The Moran of the Burning Spear, (MBS) by the Government of Kenya
- c) The National Order of Merit (NOM), the highest State recognition by the Algerian Government
- d) Several other awards given by different National Trade Union Centres in Africa, Asia, Europe and Canada.

It is therefore in recognition of Mr. Atwoli's distinguished contribution to Labour Relations locally and globally, his efforts in enhancing industrial peace, his advocacy for decent work for all and his defence for workers' dignity, rights and welfare that Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology is proud to confer the **Doctor of Humane Letters (Labour Relations) Honoris Causa** degree to Mr. Francis Atwoli.

Mr. Chancellor Sir, I am therefore greatly honoured and privileged to request you to honour by conferring the degree of **Doctor of Humane Letters (Labour Relations) Honoris Causa** of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology to Mr. Francis Atwoli.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MR. FRANCIS ATWOLI**



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