



# Ambassador from Ghana Addresses Law School

Dr. Alex Quaison-Sackey  
at J. Reuben Clark Law School

"We hope the future will bring a new period of stability and peace," said the Ghanaian ambassador to the United States on February 15, 1979, to a packed audience of law students in the Moot Court Room of the Law School. He was brought to Provo by the Law School and his subject was "Marriage and the Law in Ghana."

Dr. Alex Quaison-Sackey was the first black appointed to be president of the United Nations General Assembly. He is currently the ambassador to the United States from Ghana, a country which is making a "very peaceful" transition from a military government to a civilian government. The West African nation of 10 million people will trade its military government for a republic on July 1. Ghana has gone through a long string of alternate republics and military coups over the last 20 years, but over the last two years the government has taken many steps to return to civilian rule.

Among these steps was the appointment of a constitutional assembly which is "currently in the process of drawing up a constitution," said Dr. Quaison-Sackey. It will include "an executive American-type president, a bill of human rights . . . a parliament-type legislature, an independent judicial system." The assembly will present the finished constitution to the government April 16. Elections for the new government's

leaders will be held June 15. Quaison-Sackey denied a comment by a BYU law professor that he may be a candidate for Ghana's new presidential position.

In speaking of marriage customs in Ghana, Quaison-Sackey said "Marriage in Ghanaian society is not a simple matter of 'boy meets girl' It is an important matter to the family, not just between a man and a woman but between the families of a man and a woman." Marriage laws in the country fall into three categories: customary law, Mohamedan law and statutory law which traces its origin to Britain. "A high premium is placed on chastity," he said. "A married woman cannot even be seen to flirt with a man besides her husband." Girls go through puberty rites at about age 12 and young boys spend several days in the forest living off the land to prove their manhood, Dr. Quaison-Sackey said.

Upon marriage, an elaborate rite is conducted to prove the bride's chastity. If she is unchaste, material compensation must be made to the groom. However, polygamy is "very common in Ghana, even today," said Quaison-Sackey. "It is still strong, not dead at all." Under the law, first wives have no more rights than the other ones. If a man marries a woman by statutory law he may not turn around and marry another woman under customary law. However, if his first marriage was by customary

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law, he may marry again, even if he desires to marry under statutory law

When asked about the divorce rate in Ghana, Dr Quaison-Sackey said that in the rural areas it was very low, however in the large cities and towns where life had become westernized it was comparable to our own. In terms of the family size, most families in Ghana number from six to eight people, relatively high compared to the United States. As a personal anecdote, the ambassador commented in his thick British-Ghanaian accent, "I have six children. My secretary only has four, but then he is a young man."

