

Introducing Mrs. Douha Smith - Her Story

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The Ambassador's Wife

On a sunny day in early November in Washington, D.C., UPF had the opportunity to speak with Douha Smith, the wife of H.E. Joseph Henry Smith, ambassador of Ghana to the United States. Mrs. Smith is currently serving a one-year term as president of the Spouses of African Ambassadors Association (SAAA) in Washington, D.C.

The Republic of Ghana is a West African country located along the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean that has a population of 27 million. The word Ghana means “warrior king” in Mande, a language spoken by approximately one million people in West Africa. English is the official language of the country, which was a former British colony. In 1957, it became the first country in the Sahara to gain its independence. While Ghana has many diverse tribes, who maintain their unique traditions, Ghanaians adhere to the central principles of a modern democracy—freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and tolerance. Ghana is one of the fastest growing economies in the region. In the summer of 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama traveled to Ghana, the final stop of one of his first international trips as President.

Mrs. Smith arrived in Washington, D.C. almost a year ago. Ambassador Joseph H. Smith presented a letter of credence to President Obama in a ceremony at the White House on November 18, 2014.

Family and Education

UPF met Mrs. Smith at the official residence of the ambassador of Ghana. She appeared wearing a head scarf and a beautiful blue dress, hand woven of Kente fabrics. She recalled a much colder day in Washington when she took her two sons trick-or-treating. It was 27 years ago during her first extended stay in the city for her husband's assignment as defense, military, naval and air attaché of Ghana to the U.S. “Those boys matured into handsome men—the youngest is doing his Masters in Sweden, and the oldest has started a film production company in Ghana,” she said.

Mrs. Smith's grandfather was Lebanese, and her grandmother, Ghanaian. After her father's death, her mother took over his business of trading goods. “My mother became a single mum at the age of 27 years and had to raise four children. I am the youngest. My mother brought us up and we all went to school, lived, worked, and got married in Ghana. I speak English, Twi (a dialect of Akan of the Niger-Congo languages) and Arabic.”

Reflecting on her own educational experience, she noted that children in Ghana usually spend the last two years of school prior to university away from home attending boarding schools. “The parents of the students can visit every other Sunday. That was the time to develop strong bonds among students and deep friendships, which in many cases become lifelong relationships.”



Pride in Serving Ghana in the United States

Mrs. Smith said she was enthusiastic to return to Washington, D.C. as the wife of the ambassador of Ghana: “I am grateful for the opportunity given to my husband to represent our president and the people of Ghana for the second time in the United States. It is a privilege and an honor to represent my country—especially since there is so much development [and changes are] occurring in my country. Ghana is growing very fast and is in such an exciting time in its history. Today, Ghana is referred to as a model of democracy in Africa. I am especially excited to be in the United States at this time.”

Women Have a Special Gift from God

Mrs. Smith has strong ideas about the role women play in building a peaceful society in the world. “I believe God has given women special talents to bring into this world. We are very spiritual. Women have strong intuition that we can use to find best ways to bring people together. They have a strong passion for bringing harmony among families and communities.”

She added, “Women and children benefit the most whenever peace prevails in a society. To bring peace to our societies, we must respect each other’s culture, religion and family values. The possibilities of your children choosing a different path must be considered, but do not debar them from being a part of the family. Mothers are looked upon as the soul of the family and have the responsibility to keep the family together at all times. When I talk about the family, it is not just husband and wife but the extended family as well.

We, women, should accept change in our daily lives. Women experience more changes during our lifetime; for example, during pregnancy and child birth.”

Marriage

Mrs. Smith views marriage as uniting two families. “It is not just the two individuals coming together; it is important for the parents of the would-be couple to agree to the marriage and therefore give their blessings. In my case, my mother took some time to give her approval and blessing for the marriage, and it was worth the wait.”

“I strongly believe in abstinence from sex before marriage and therefore support the idea about educating the youth of today about premarital sex, in schools and in homes.”

Mrs. Smith’s husband is a retired three-star general (lieutenant general) and has received numerous awards during his time in the military. While the defense minister of Ghana, he was given the Golden Star Award for Distinguished Leadership in West Africa, which recognized him as a model for leadership for national service in Africa.

When I decided to marry my husband, I went to seek advice from a very respectable nun. She asked me, “Is he good to his mother? As long as he is good to his mother, he must be a good man!” “My husband is a good man; he is very kind and caring and very sensitive to women’s plight. He is a good father to our two boys and to his and my extended family members. We have been happily married for 30 years and we thank God for that.”

The Wives of All African Ambassadors Association

Mrs. Smith also shared about her role in the Spouses of African Ambassadors Association: “I am a relative newcomer to the Washington, D.C. diplomatic community, but my colleagues decided to elect me as the new president, a position that rotates every year. The previous president was Mrs. Caroline Andjaba of Namibia.

We are committed to fostering relationships among our African countries as well as with the host nation, the U.S.

Even though we are from Africa it does not mean that we know each other or understand each other’s culture, tradition or history. We are all located in the Washington D.C. area, which gives us the opportunity to get to know and learn from one another. We have a program to educate ourselves about each other’s traditions, cultures, food, and way of life.”

Ghanaian Dishes

Mrs. Smith concluded our meeting by promoting some of Ghana’s favorite foods:

Jollof rice is a popular and common one-pot rice dish, usually eaten on special and festive occasions. It is considered a "national dish," and consists of rice mixed with tomatoes, onions, red pepper, and garlic, and is cooked with chicken or beef (or another meat).

Fufu, a popular delicacy in Ghana, is a spicy soup with goat meat and pounded plantain and yam, usually eaten in an earthenware bowl.

