

TRIBUTE BY PREMIER DAVID MAKHURA ON THE OCCASION OF THE FUNERAL OF AMBASSADOR GEORGE NENE: MORRIS ISAACSON HIGH SCHOOL, SOWETO.

13 April 2018

Members of the family and friends of Ambassador George Nene;
Seaparankoe/Isithwalandwe Ntate Andrew Mlangeni;
President Thabo Mbeki and Mrs Zanele Mbeki;
President Kgalema Motlanthe and Mrs Gugu Motlanthe;
Stalwarts and Veterans of our Struggle;
Ministers, Deputy Ministers and former Ministers;
Ambassadors and High Commissioners;
The national, provincial and regional Leadership of the ANC and the Alliance;
Comrades and Compatriots;
Fellow mourners:

Today we have come together to bid a final farewell to a special comrade, an outstanding patriot and an accomplished diplomat who served our country and our people with distinction.

On behalf of the people of Gauteng and the provincial government, I bring condolences to the family of our departed Comrade George Nene. We say to the family; your loss is our loss.

It is difficult to come to terms with the inescapable and devastatingly painful reality that Bra George - our Teacher, our Mentor and the accomplished Diplomat is no more. He made a huge impact on the struggle to transform our country into a democratic and free society.

Unfortunately and inevitably, to bid farewell to that special generation which stands out as the most distinguished freedom fighters has become a regular occurrence.

Death is something that we as human beings will never get used to. The pain and anguish it imprints in our hearts and the gaping wounds of solitude it leaves in our lives are incalculable.

And yet, it is death that puts someone's life in true perspective. We can only appreciate the full meaning and beauty of life when we look at someone's life at the end of their journey.

Both in revolution and in religion, we have to understand that life and death are interlinked and inseparable. Philosophers and Apostles agree on the certainty and inevitability of mortality.

The fundamental question is therefore not we shall die or not but how we live such purposeful lives in the service humanity that can we live in the hearts of many even after our mortality.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr makes the point that “it is the quality, not the longevity, of life that is important”.

In the words of Mark Twain: “let us endeavour so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry”.

Bertolt Brecht says: “do not fear death so much but rather the inadequate life”.

Christ Jesus is said to have advised his disciples that instead of crying for him when he was crucified, they should worry about living lives of purposes to follow his example.

Ambassador George Nene has given his entire life to the most sacred and most sublime of all causes: the liberation of humankind. He has given more than five decades of his life to the struggle for freedom, the reconstruction of South Africa and the effort to build a better Africa and better world.

He was such a powerful and useful instrument of revolution that even the funeral undertaker is sorry, as Mark Twain would have wished.

He lived such an adequate, fulfilling and purposeful life that, according to Bertolt Brecht, he had no reason to fear death.

I think the quality of his contribution to the struggle for freedom and the reintegration of democratic South Africa would have met the expectations of Dr Martin Luther King Jr, Mark Twain and Bertolt Brecht

Sometimes we say at funerals: “we are not here to mourn but to celebrate” even when there is very little to celebrate.

I believe today we have good reason not only to mourn but also to celebrate a life of dedication and service to humanity that Bra George lived. What more can we ask of a man who has done so much for our country, continent and the world in pursuit a just, peaceful and more equal world!

Ambassador Nene's passing is more painful because it happens at a time when the nation is mourning the loss of our beloved mother, Mama Winnie Madikizela Mandela. Few days ago, we also lost another veteran and outstanding revolutionary, Dr Zola Skweyiya. All of them passed in April.

April is a Heroes Month in which we remember our fallen heroes such as Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu, Chris Hani, O.R Tambo, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Dr Zola Skweyiya all of whom passed in April. The African American civil rights movement leader Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr was also assassinated in April.

As the people of Gauteng, we dip our revolutionary banner in honour of Comrade George Nene the freedom fighter, a gallant fighter of uMkhonto weSizwe's June 16 Detachment, a seasoned and tireless campaigner for the international isolation of the apartheid regime.

We salute him for flying the ANC flag and our nation's flag high in international arena.

We convey our gratitude to the Nene family for sharing him with us. You should be filled with contentment in the knowledge that he served the ANC and the people of South Africa loyally.

Bra George, we also thank you in particular for your contribution in crafting South Africa's foreign policy and for training and mentoring our country's new and young diplomats.

As cadres who also have family responsibilities, we are inspired by Bra George's role as a loving father to his children and family.

As younger activists of the ANC and broad democratic movement, we thank Comrade George for being an exceptional source of knowledge and wisdom. He was a man of impeccable integrity, superior intellect but humble demeanor.

Those of us who are in government must be seriously challenged to emulate his exemplary conduct as a committed civil servant who served the people with characteristic honour, humility and distinction.

As a teacher at Morris Isaacson, where we are today, Bra George groomed and inspired many young people who led the historic June 1976 uprisings – uprisings which in many ways altered the course of history in our country.

Perhaps, Don Matera, our celebrated poet and activist, had Bra George and his children in mind when he authored the poem “Child”:

*“The leaves of the tree of my life,
grow brown and thin,
soon they will fall to earth and be forgotten.
Much fruit has withered,
Only a few strong boughs remain,
But they too will be broken by the erosion of time.
But all of my fruit, all things dear and close to my heart,
Was you and the hope manifest in your being – you
the offspring of an invincible dream...”*

*Yet, all I asked of you is to remember me for what I tried to do,
tried to offer so that a New Bright Sun will rise on your day,
That a portion of my dream for the freedom of my people
would find a place in your song and in your dreams,
that my name and those who marched with me
would be recorded on your scroll.”*

Yes, the leaves of the tree of Bra George’s life have grown brown and thin and have fallen to earth. All the things dear and close to Bra George’s heart, a portion of his dream for the freedom of his people has found a place in our song and in our dreams.

Bra George’s name and those of many others who marched with him have been recorded in our scroll of selfless revolutionaries who will never be forgotten and his weighty legacy will far outlive his mortality.

Once more, we convey our words of comfort to the family, relatives, friends and comrades of Bra George.

Alwehlanga lungehlanga! Hamba kahle Mkhonto!

Thank you!