

Tribute to Minister Jackson "Mjeke Jeke" Mthembu

What a great loss! I write with a heavy heart and sorrow "mngani wam" as you would call me, i never thought i would pay tribute to you in this manner and so soon.

Yesterday, at around 13h30, *whilst i was busy organizing the funeral service of my Aunt (my Mother's sister) Lulama Xoliswa Mashologu who passed away on the 20th January, Lala ngoxolo Bhelekazi and my second mother*, i got the call from my colleague Dr Gwen Ramokgoba which added salt to wound. I have lost many family members before, from my Dad (Rev A.D. Mtimde) to my siblings and many other in 2020 from COVID19 from my daughter (Kwanele Makhathini) to oo Tatomncane and ooMamncane, etc. but i never felt a deep wound, hurt and devastation like yesterday.

Our relationship goes years ago, in the ANC and the NEC Communications Subcommittee you Chaired and is deep. In my adult life, i probably spent a lot of time with you than with some of my relatives. We wrote / drafted many ANC discussion papers together on the "Battle of Ideas, ICT and communications", many press statements even for ANC Parliament. By way of delegation, you and Cde Pallo Jordan, threw me in deep end, empowering me to be a de facto "ANC spokesman on the interpretation of the ANC Resolutions on the Battle of Ideas", leaving me with a title of the proponent of the establishment of independent media regulation, what the opponents reduced to the Media Appeals Tribunal without the context (independent regulation). I always obliged and enjoyed the task. You always without fail, said i represented the organization well under all round attack from the media and the opposition. You assured me that the ANC commitment to media freedom, accountability, independent regulation is unshaken.

As the ANC Chief Whip, you remained supportive even at times when i was attacked by our own comrades on the ANC resolution on the broadcasting digital migration. You came to my support when lies were spread in Parliament that i do not have qualifications, you issued an ANC Parliament statement that led to media houses instructed by the Press Ombudsman to apologizing to me. Whenever you were facing irresponsible attacks by the media, you asked your then spokesperson Nonceba Mhlauli to work with me on the strategy and press statements leading again the media issuing apologies to you.

Fast forward, in June 2019, after the 2019 Elections, you called me to join you in the Presidency as your Special Advisor. I have since then worked again closely with you, you led us with distinction. Your leadership and work ethics is exemplary.

The 21st January 2021, is a day of unbelievable, shocking and devastating news, which i will never forget. "Inene isitya esihle asidleli". What a loss. With a heavy heart, lets celebrate the life of a larger than life person, a communicator par excellence, a giant, an outstanding leader, a people's person, a disciplined, principled, consistent, trusted cadre, a unifier, a selfless freedom fighter and a comrade with humility.

You epitomized servant leadership, you served the nation well, you gave all of yourself to all of us. I will miss your daily morning and evening calls. When we work on something, you would not stop calling, you drop the call and call again and again. I got used to doing my walk and jogging from 04h30 as i knew, i should be online around 06h30 as you would call. I will miss our engagements. Even when we differ on a matter, you led and ruled but later, after reflecting, you would call and acknowledge the correct view and reconcile. You honestly, humility, tolerance and lone voice of reason when necessary, is incomparable. Mvelase, you are amongst a few, as you knew the difference between fiction and facts, one who was ethical perceived to be upright, a leader who we all could still trust, even as we faced so many challenges as a country, organization and society.

To Sis' Thembi, your children and the family, your pain is our pain too. We shall regain strength and move forward. But yes, life will never be the same again. Deepest and heartfelt condolences to the family, the ANC and the alliance, friends, South Africans and all of us in The Presidency.

Hamba kahle Mkhonto. Hamba kahle Mphathiswa, my Boss, my Cde , my brother, my friend and my Leader. Lala ngoxolo Mvelase Jackson Mthembu. Lala ngoxolo Mvelase. We will miss you dearly. #RIPJacksonMthembu

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