

# Remembering those we have lost

*It would be impossible to pay tribute to all who have died from Covid-19 by recording their stories. IFAA therefore singles out a number of reported deaths – whose specific circumstances and experiences raised public attention. Sourced from the media, IFAA offers this tragic list as a symbolic memorial to all South Africans we have lost to Covid-19. All their stories are as important as anyone else's and all belong in the history books that will one day record this tragic time.*

## **FOREVER A FREEDOM FIGHTER – JACKSON MTHEMBU**

The Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) deeply regrets the loss of a gentleman and a fighter, Mr Jackson Mthembu, who served as Minister in the Presidency before his untimely death following complications resulting from Covid-19. He was 62 years old. Previously the ANC Chief Whip in the National Assembly, he also spent years as the ANC spokesperson.

IFAA remembers him as a man of dedication and integrity. He spent most of his life in the struggle for democracy and IFAA sees his death as a severe loss for South Africa. The calibre of leadership that he brought to the ANC and the National Assembly served citizens across the political spectrum and he will always be remembered for his courageous and determined struggle to defeat apartheid.

Tributes for Mthembu poured in after the news of his death was reported, including condolences from a range of political parties. Health Minister Zweli Mkhize was reported as saying “a giant tree has fallen”. At his funeral service President Cyril Ramaphosa said he had “lost a dear friend” and praised the late Mthembu for being in the forefront of the fight against Covid-19. The president thanked the medical team who he said had “done all they could” to save him.

A profile released by the office of the presidency reported that Mthembu had cut his political teeth in student politics as a leader of the 1976 uprising. His activism continued when he went on to study at the University of Fort Hare, resulting in his expulsion in 1980. An active figure in the emerging trade unions, he went on to

work tirelessly in the United Democratic Front in the 1980s where he was appointed Deputy Regional Secretary of the province now known as Gauteng. He was detained repeatedly, suffering solitary confinement and other forms of torture at the hands of the apartheid security police. After his acquittal in the protracted ‘Bethal Treason Trial’ he went underground and continued his political activities.

Following the unbanning of the ANC he played a part in the Codesa negotiations and the Constituent Assembly that crafted the democratic Constitution. Since then he filled many strategic positions in the party’s leadership and was a member of the National Executive Committee since 2007.

## **DR ANWAH NAGIA**

The respected community activist and businessman, Dr Anwah Nagia, succumbed to the Covid-19 virus on 28 September 2020. Until his passing he was the Chairperson of the District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust and had also previously been a founder member of the Palestine Museum. His many other activities as a business figure included Chairperson of Element Investment Managers, Executive Chair of Altius Investment Holdings and Non-Executive Chair of the Cape Town Market and Africa Commodities Group.

## **STANLEY HENKEMAN**

The Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) died in mid-December due to complications related to Covid-19. In a statement, the IJR said at the time, “Stan’s kindness and humanity made a deep impression on all of us, and we will miss him dearly. His legacy and passion for the IJR’s vision of building fair, democratic, and inclusive societies will continue to inspire the Institute in years to come.”

## **SAM AND INDRANI PILLAY**

Sam Pillay, who ran the Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal anti-drug forum, has succumbed to Covid-19. For years a determined crusader against the scourge of drug abuse in his community, Pillay, who used to be a teacher, passed away only two days after the death of Indrani, also from Covid-19.

## **MARIUS VAN HEERDEN**

Former South African 800m record holder who represented South Africa at the 1996 Olympics has died of Covid-19 at the age of 46.

## **PHUMLA AND PHUMEZA LUGULWANA**

These twin sisters, aged 46, died of Covid-19 within hours of each other.

## **LAURENCE DWORKIN**

Respected film maker, founder member of South Africa’s Independent Producers Organisation, and co-founder in 1985 of Video News Services and Afravision Video Collective which documented and publicised apartheid state violence during the 1980s, died of Covid in May 2020 at the age of 64.

## **AMOS KOMENI**

An active member of the South African Communist Party and project administrator in the office of the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly since 2014, Komeni died of Covid-19 at the age of 60.

## **DR CLARENCE MINI**

Dr Mini, who was appointed chairperson of the Council for Medical Schemes by former Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi, passed away a month after contracting Covid-19 in May 2020. He was co-chairperson of the National AIDS Convention on SA and a trustee of the Government Employees Medical Schemes (Gems), as well as a board member of numerous medical institutions.

## **PROF GITA RAMJEE**

An internationally renowned scientist in the field of HIV prevention, Ramjee was Chief Scientific Officer at Aurum Institute and before that Director of the HIV Prevention Research Unit at the SA Medical Research Council. She passed away in March last year due to Covid-related complications.

## **SHONISANI LETHOLE**

Lethole died in Thembisa hospital in July 2020. He was admitted with breathing difficulties. His story was widely reported when it emerged that he had not been fed in hospital for 100 hours and 54 minutes. During that time he tweeted Health Minister Zweli Mkhize pleading for help.