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# The death of KK

## Kenneth Kaunda: last of the giants

*By James Ngculu*

A former MK commissar and a founding member of the MK Military Intelligence, and later its Deputy Chief, JAMES NGCULU left South Africa for military training following the 1976 Soweto uprising. After years of exile, he returned to South Africa and became an MP in the first democratic Parliament.

*Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of independent Zambia, died on 17 June 2021. He will always be remembered by the people of South Africa with a deep sense of gratitude for his unwavering support for the liberation movements and the base he provided when they were in exile. JAMES NGCULU of the South African Communist Party paid tribute to this giant of Pan-Africanism at an online memorial. The Institute for African Alternatives thanks him for allowing us to publish his speech. IFAA takes this opportunity to bow its head to Kaunda, a friend and comrade to South Africa during the darkest times.*



### **THE END OF AN ERA**

The passing on of Kaunda marks the end of an era. It closes the chapter of those founding fathers of the [then] OAU [Organisation of Africa Unity], who committed Africa to unity and the fight against colonialism and apartheid. Africa shall forever be indebted to a group of great giants committed to the humanist values of Kaunda.

These are greats such as Haile Selassie I, Ahmed Ben Bella, Abdel Nasser, Habib Bourguiba, Ahmadu Ahidjo, Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmed Sekou Touré, Patrice Lumumba, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, Philibert Tsitsiraka, William Tubman, O R Tambo, Agostinho Neto, Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo, Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel, and Nelson Mandela. The only leader of the national liberation movement remaining now is Sam Nujoma.

### **MOULDING A UNITED ZAMBIA**

Kenneth Kaunda's mission [was always] to unite Zambia into one country. He mobilized various parties to unite behind the Choma Declaration and the new government system of 'one party participatory democracy'.

### **DOWN MEMORY LANE – THE LIVING AND THE DEAD**

In the township of Chilenje, there is a small house, now called Chilenje House Number 394, that was home to Kenneth Kaunda between 1960 and 1962. The modesty of this house is the best depiction of the modesty KK embodied throughout his life.

The ANC moved its headquarters from Morogoro, Tanzania to Lusaka, Zambia in 1970. It was based at the African Liberation Centre, in Kamwala, just outside the Lusaka central business district. This was the property of the Zambian government and was guarded by the army [against] raids, especially by [the then Rhodesian Ian] Smith regime. The Liberation Centre accommodated all the liberation movements of southern Africa.

The ANC's chief representative was Thomas Nkobi, who also was deputy treasurer general. (The treasurer general

was Malome Moses Kotane, who was at the time in a hospital in Moscow). Nkobi worked with Tennyson Makiwane, Gertrude Shope and Jacky Sedibe, among others.

This became the gathering place for the liberation movements of southern Africa, yet today it has no plaque or symbol reflecting its historic importance.

Zambian Broadcasting Services (ZBS), situated in the suburb of Longacres in Lusaka, is where [the ANC's] Radio Freedom started its broadcasts on 25 May 1973. It operated in these studios alongside the MPLA, Unita, Swapo and Zapu. It is here that Radio Freedom, under Thabo Mbeki and Duma Nokwe, beamed its broadcasts to South Africa. Its message moved many people and the opening staccato of a volley of gunfire from AK 47s evoked in listeners a spirit of defiance and commitment to fight for justice.

In 1974, the ANC moved its headquarters to a backroom of a building in a sanitary lane between Chachacha and Cairo roads in Lusaka's central business district. It was from here that president OR Tambo, secretary general Alfred Nzo and treasurer general Thomas Nkobi operated. Sindiso Mfenyana was the administrator of the secretary general's office.

Sadly today this office of the ANC lies in ruins. There is no commemorative plaque here either marking this building as a heritage site. The backroom is now a storeroom for a general goods store and the building is derelict with piles of grey computers lying on top of each other. It's a very bad and sad sight.

When veteran journalist Nikiwe Bikitsha went to Zambia to see the ANC's historic places she visited the ANC headquarters and was astonished by what she saw. Accompanied by a tour guide who specialises in liberation routes in Zambia, she said at [the former] ANC HQ, "We leave the ghost of the ANC beneath the rubble, under the debris of grey, dusty TVs".

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**The presence of the national liberation movement impacted on the lives of Zambians, but Kenneth Kaunda was steadfast in his support of the ANC.**



**ANC HQ (Chachacha Rd), Lusaka, from: Nikiwe Bikitsha, 2017**

OR Tambo stayed in many places. At first, he occasionally stayed at Kabolonga, a suburb in Lusaka, at the home of a school principal, a Mr Gaoepepe. Later he stayed with a number of MK soldiers in Makeni, a farming area known as Gonagudzingwa just outside Lusaka. By the 1980s, OR had established his residence in a suburb of Avondale, where he occupied a double storey building. This house is now a national heritage site known as OR Tambo House.

These symbols [remind us] of the trailblazers of our movement who stayed in Lusaka for the better part of their exile lives. These veterans, who spearheaded the struggle against apartheid, would have shed a tear over the death of Kaunda as they remembered the road they travelled. It

is a moment to think also of those who have departed, for theirs was a service unparalleled in commitment and unsurpassed in dedication and bravery.

The list of these trailblazers cannot fit into this space. However, we remember O R Tambo, Duma Nokwe, Thomas Nkobi, Alfred Nzo, Mzwai Piliso, Joe Modise, Mangwana Nkobi, Tiny Nokwe, Sophie de Bruyn, Ray and Jack Simons, Mac Maharaj, Reg September, Josiah Jele, Joe Nhlanhla, John Motshabe, Gertrude Shope, Sizakele Sigxeshe, Ruth Mompoti, Agnes Msimang, Zola Skweyiya, Robert Ramano, Simon Makana, Sam Komane, Peter Boroko, Anthony Mongalo, Willie Williams, Cassius Make, Ulyses Modise, Dalaboy Mtyeku, Vuyisile Mdala, Japhet Ndlovi, Hinsta Tshume and many others.

These veterans who made Zambia their home were completely dependent on the supplies given to them, including *mphando* and *Arbanye*. Amazingly, *Arbanye* remained at 20 Kwacha (equivalent to less than R1) from 1970 to 1990. The symbolism of this 20 Kwacha *Arbanye* should never be lost. It's an eloquent statement about the ANC leadership; every cadre and leader of the ANC must not aspire to monetary value or riches.

No money was provided for petrol. ANC members were given vouchers for use at specific garages. Food and clothing were supplied by the ANC. We got to know of the queues at Awolo's place where we got our food supplies (Awolo was the comrade responsible for this all his exile life). All these measures were to discourage corruption and expose anyone living a life of opulence.

These veterans of the liberation movement, the living and the dead, understood the singular commitment of Kaunda to liberation struggle, a struggle infused with justice and commitment. He was a father figure who was not just loving but also humane and charming. His signature song, *Tiyende pamodzi ndi mtima umodzi* – 'let's go as one, with one heart' – still evokes fond memories today. >>



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[we] once again  
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### **ONE ZAMBIA, ONE NATION**

To quote Kaunda, 'there is no doubt in my mind that without the government of national unity's declaration of "One Party Participatory Democracy," we could not have achieved much for the needy and the freedom struggle. The declaration was God sent, helping the people and the region.'

We were impressed by the slogan for a united Zambia that Kaunda would shout at gatherings at the showgrounds. The significance of his slogan, 'one Zambia, one nation', is immense. To South Africans it represents the statement of the founding fathers of the ANC; we are one nation.

The 'one Zambia, one nation' slogan was a paradigmatic statement of a common nationhood and a united country. It was a nation bound by a common national anthem and flag. Being Bemba or Ngoni was subservient to Zambian-ness.

Kaunda also championed the one-party state, [which] was a dominant paradigm in the African continent then. Kaunda pursued this policy infused with his humanism philosophy. The humanism espoused by Kenneth Kaunda was not synonymous with pacifism. It recognised the right of the colonised to free themselves by any means possible. In the context

of struggle, against apartheid and the Namibian occupation, there was strength in the one-party state policy.

### **KAUNDA THE DIPLOMAT, HUMANIST**

KK was an accomplished diplomat. His meetings with [former apartheid prime minister, John] Vorster in 1974 at the Victoria Falls demonstrated his diplomatic skills. His friendly, ever-present white handkerchief, and his strong Christian beliefs, belied the supreme commitment of KK to the national liberation struggle in southern Africa. We South Africans, in particular, owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

Not only did he allow the ANC to work without interference, he also turned a blind eye to MK activities, and actively assisted the ANC. At Lusaka International Airport many MK cadres left for their missions usually with forged passports or an A4-sized 'passport' provided to the ANC people by the Zambian government. The ANC had its own dedicated person at immigration, 'Cde Javel', to clear all ANC people at Lusaka airport. MK also had facilities in Livingstone which allowed it to move arms and personnel across the mighty Zambezi River. Many cadres who were deployed to South Africa and the forward areas used this route.

Kenneth Kaunda was fully aware of the risks to Zambia's economy and people of hosting the ANC and MK. Zambian police and security [forces] knew about MK activities, but never prevented them. Kaunda continued to fully support the ANC even when the economy was beginning to show signs of crumbling following the slump in copper exports and sales. The Zambian economy was pummeled and GDP nearly collapsed, yet Kaunda and Zambia never flinched in its support for the ANC.

Things got worse after the Nkomati Accord was signed, and many MK personnel [who had been in Mozambique] were moved to Lusaka. They joined MK communities in

places such as Chunga, and Mtendere, which became a hive of MK presence synonymous with the ANC and MK.

Lilanda, which accommodated leaders such as Duma Nokwe and Thomas Nkobi, was the place where the ANC community went to queue for food. Lilanda also had ANC offices, colloquially known as the Green House, and Lilanda township had a huge ANC community. When the ANC community left, many of the ANC houses in Lilanda reverted back to the Zambian Housing Corporation.

Kabwata, which hosted a meeting place of the PMC and MHQ, was where Alfred Nzo, Sizakele Sigxashe, Agnes Msimang and Joe Nhlanhla lived. Others who stayed there for a while included Joe Modise, Chris Hani and Steve Tshwete. Kabwata township also had a huge ANC community. Another township with a large ANC community was Chilenje where Cassius Make stayed. (He was later killed by apartheid security forces).

The DIP operated from Makeni, a smallholding outside Lusaka. The ANC also had a children's creche at Greater East Road, Lusaka. This was a Women Section project sponsored by the Italians. There was a clinic in Emmersdale, the ANC had Star furnishers which made furniture for the ANC and a garage where ANC cars were repaired.

Zambian people are extremely friendly people. They have a wry sense of humour that will floor anyone unaccustomed to such jokes. Zambia had pubs on every corner. Loudspeakers outside would bellow African music while inside bands entertained patrons.

The hospitality of Zambians was best demonstrated in these pubs. They wouldn't hesitate to invite South Africans to join them in sharing a Mosi beer, the only available beer and a popular drink in Zambia. The internationalism of Kenneth Kaunda and UNIP was demonstrated to South Africans. Zambians knew the pain Kaunda's support [for the ANC] caused in their individual and collective lives

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**They called us freedom fighters. They understood Kaunda’s mission that Zambia shall be free when Africa is free.**



but they still loved South Africans and supported their struggle.

We, the community in exile, felt this devastating economic decline in shortages of food and goods. Shortages of Mosi beer [led to] extremely high prices. Mealie meal, the staple food of Zambians, was in short supply. The presence of the national liberation movement indeed impacted on the lives of Zambians, but Kenneth Kaunda was steadfast in his support of the ANC

and Swapo of Namibia. Never once did he call O R Tambo to say that the exile community was a burden or was making him unpopular with his people.

For this, the death of Kenneth David Kaunda is indeed a very sad moment. We members of the ANC owe Zambia, Africa and the international community that supported our struggle a huge debt of gratitude. The death of Kaunda is indeed an end of an era of leaders who were selfless and committed to the ideals of freedom, whatever the toll and pain.

We used to sing “Oh’ the Soviet people, Oh’ the loving people, Oh’ the Cuban people, Oh’ the loving people, Oh’ the Zambian people, Oh’ the loving people – we are far from home, we shall need you, we shall love you, for the things you have done for us”. This, comrades, is an internationalist song of the ANC in appreciation of internationalism in the struggle against apartheid. This must remain etched in our hearts.

We, members of the ANC, having imbibed the tradition of the Freedom Charter that there shall be peace and friendship, must remain true to this internationalism. In this regard, the freedoms and struggles of the Saharawi people and people of Palestine, and the blockade against Cuba, must occupy our minds.

The youth of South Africa must be educated about the quality of leaders such as Kenneth Kaunda. These are leaders of a rare breed. In honour of KK, his life and times, it is important to once again salute the Zambian people. Despite their sufferings, they never turned against Kaunda or UNIP, or the liberation movements. They called us

freedom fighters. They were ready to share with South Africans. Even the *mshanga* boys”, those young chaps in the informal economy who sold loose cigarettes for a living, never stopped loving and respecting freedom fighters. They understood Kaunda’s mission that Zambia shall be free when Africa is free.

Kaunda and his colleagues pledged their support and commitment to African unity and pan-Africanism. They knew that the role and manoeuvres of colonial powers would linger on even after liberation.

OR Tambo, delivering his January statement in 1987, said:

President Kaunda, together with his party, UNIP, and its government and the brotherly people of Zambia, stands as a great pillar of strength for the peoples of southern Africa, for the people of South Africa and Namibia a pillar that is visible from across the continent and beyond the oceans.

At 97 not out, with Covid-19 ravaging Africa and the world, Kaunda died having fulfilled his mission on earth. Now that the curtain has closed, and Kaunda joins his esteemed colleagues in another world, we shall no longer see him with his guitar, singing *Tiyende pamodzi ndi mtamo umodzi* ‘let’s go as one in one heart’.

He leaves a Zambia that is united. A Zambia that honoured him with 25 days of mourning! We can imagine him waving his white handkerchief to many revolutionaries as his final goodbye.

Everlasting glory to Kenneth David Kaunda. **NA**