



## **President Cyril Ramaphosa: Eulogy at the official funeral of Minister Jackson Mthembu**

24 Jan 2021

Programme Directors,  
Minister Gwede Mantashe  
Lindiwe Ntshali Ntshali  
Deputy President David Mabuza,  
Members of the Mthembu family,  
Premier of Mpumalanga, Ms Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane,  
Ministers, Deputy Ministers and MECs,  
Mayor of Emalahleni  
Leadership of the African National Congress and the Alliance,  
Leaders of Political Parties  
The Right Reverend Bishop Xolelo Kumalo of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Witbank,  
Religious and traditional leaders present,  
Comrades and Friends,  
Fellow Mourners,

On this day, a great shadow has fallen and hangs upon this place of the rising sun, and it hangs heavy across the entire land.

Minister Jackson Mthembu, Comrade Jackson, Mvelase, is no more.

For those who knew him, who worked alongside him, who counted and relied on him, who were led by him, who learned from him, who loved him, it is unbearable that we will never see him again.

I was shocked and heartbroken when I received the news of Minister Mthembu's untimely passing from the Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize and the doctor who was in charge of treating him, Dr Williams, on Thursday.

The news struck a deep and solemn note.

I remembered the words of William Shakespeare, that when sorrows come, they come not as single spies, but in battalions.

The coronavirus has caused so many sorrows in our country.

Our society, like most around the world, has been plunged into turmoil.

We have lost so many lives to this disease.

There have been tears and grief in so many homes.

We have had to endure so much that at times it has seemed too great to bear.

And now the stroke of death has taken the very one who has been our citadel, our rock and our tower of strength at this dreadful moment in our country's history.

Amidst this great upheaval, when our people are so fearful of the future, they have looked to leaders like Jackson Mthembu for reassurance and for certainty.

As the Minister in the Presidency, he was the public face of our government, communicating its policies and its decisions.

During the pandemic, he carried our message of compassion, solidarity and unity.

Minister Mthembu was at the forefront of our national effort to contain the coronavirus pandemic; the very pandemic that has now claimed him.

When we found ourselves close to despair, as a people and a nation, he offered hope.

When our nation's spirits were down and flagging, he lifted them up.

He brought clarity, certainty and the utmost professionalism to every task he was assigned.

He has left a huge void in our government, in the movement to which he dedicated his life and in the country of which he was such a proud citizen.

Mvelase was among those infinitely rare individuals in our politically-charged society.

He was admired and respected across party lines.

It has been profoundly touching to witness how the news of Jackson Mthembu's passing stilled the clatter and bickering that has consumed us in recent times and united us in our sorrow.

One dare hope that the sentiment that has been displayed at Jackson Mthembu's passing is a reminder that we have far more in common than we may choose to believe, whether as members of society or as political parties.

After all, we all want one thing: what is best for our country.

We have lost a man who was able to transcend political differences, and to reach out and forge alliances in pursuit of a common goal.

We need more men and women like him, who understand and appreciate that we are all heading in the same direction, and that the onward march to a better South Africa is so much easier if we work together.

He was a man who was greatly respected and loved.

By his family, by his community, by his colleagues in Cabinet, by his comrades in the ANC, by his fellow MPs, and by his friends in the media with whom he had longstanding and cordial relations.

I have lost not just a dependable colleague and a comrade.

I have lost a dear friend, and it is a loss I feel most keenly.

Minister Mthembu had many virtues that I observed over the many years of the friendship we shared.

He was generous in spirit and had a charming personality.

He had the endearing ability to lift my mood and fortify my resolve in even the most difficult situations.

He had a sense of humour that was often most irreverent.

He laughed – with his entire body – about things that he probably shouldn't have, just as he cared deeply about everything that he should.

He was principled and a man of great courage, in times of both calm and difficulty.

He was an honest man who never hesitated to speak up for what he believed to be right, no matter the cost.

His life was full of meaning and accomplishment in the way he dedicated himself to serve the people of our country.

I will remember him for his kindness, his professional approach, but above all for his ever-present sense of calm, even in a crisis or when we would be under extreme pressure.

He was a voice of reason, a voice of wisdom, which he exemplified in the advice he gave me as a Minister in the Presidency.

Not a single day would go past without him calling me for some matter or other.

At times he would call just to say, "How are you, Mr President?".

He was faithful and loyal.

To his movement, the African National Congress, he worked so hard on a daily basis to advance its cause.

To the government he swore to serve.

To the Constitution he pledged to defend and protect.

To his Cabinet colleagues and to me as his President.

But his greatest loyalty was reserved for this country and its people.

We remember the young firebrand, student activist and trade union leader who fought for our liberation from tyranny, guided not by ambition or expectation of reward, but by his principles.

We remember the committed member and leader of the ANC who for many years served as its spokesperson and its Chief Whip in Parliament.

We remember him as a spirited and lively Member of Parliament who won the respect of his peers, even on the opposition benches.

We remember the intellectual force of his contribution in every structure that he served.

We will miss the way he swayed, cajoled and persuaded all of us with his rich and booming voice, his charming words, his clever turn of phrase and his wonderful sense of humour.

We remember a leader of substantial stature who engaged everyone with respect and dignity.

To the Mthembu family, it could not have been easy.

We know that he was open about the tragedies that befell the family when his daughter passed away and when he lost his mother.

In doing so he was showing solidarity with every other South African man, woman and child who had gone through pain or hardship.

He was saying to us: I know what it feels like. I have been through it too. I am with you, and you do not need to feel alone.

He took us as the nation into his confidence, and he permitted us in his private space to share in his sorrow.

And today, we the people of South Africa mourn with you as an extended family, for he was not just our leader. We claim him too as our family member as our brother.

As we pay homage to him today, let us remember him for what he was, a servant leader who loved the people of this great land, and put them above love of party, of leader, and of self.

It is not enough to eulogise our departed comrade.

We must complete what he was not able to finish in his lifetime: the cause of renewing and rebuilding his beloved movement, of restoring the nation's faith in this government, and of

building an ethical state that is led by men and women of honour, of principle and of conviction.

Minister Mthembu was a kind and gentle soul, but when it came to corruption, to self-serving leadership and to brazen abuse of power, you would see another side to him.

He was never deceived by the false smiles and empty promises of those who sought to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and the weak.

He called them out, and he didn't care if they were more powerful than he was.

He risked his life for the liberation of our country and despaired as we stumbled and as we lost our way.

It is the greatest tragedy to have lost him, particularly at this time, as we strive to return to a path of integrity, of selfless service and of transformation.

And yet we do not despair.

We may have lost his principled strident voice, but his spirit lives on in the countless young men and women that he mentored and trained over the years.

Many have gone on to occupy valued positions within society.

His spirit and work will live on.

Over the past few days I have been heartened by the number of people who have told me of the role Mvelase played not just in their careers, but in instilling in them what it truly means to be a public servant.

This has not been a difficult time; it has been a time of great difficulty.

It is a reminder of just what a multifaceted personality he was.

He loved being amongst people, but at the same time enjoyed solitude and introspection.

He was a leader who understood the power of collective leadership, of discipline and of forging unity.

He was gentle, but could be firm and uncompromising when the occasion demanded.

He was a man of the people and for the people.

He stood for them, he worked for them, and he measured his life by how loyally he served them.

It is because he did not forget his roots and the people he committed to serve when he ascended the ranks to high office, that his place in their minds and hearts is forever assured.

To Mvelases, our hearts go out to you as you go through the grief of a loss so overwhelming.

On behalf of the government and the people of South Africa I express our deepest sympathies and condolences on your great loss.

As you walk through this difficult dark valley, I wish that God may grant you the strength to go through your bereavement and leave you only with the cherished memory of our brother and friend, Jackson Mthembu.

It is my wish that you are consoled by the knowledge that the formidable legacy of your husband, father and brother lives on.

His courage, his compassion and his service to the people of South Africa will remain a light that brightens our darkest day.

As we lay him to rest, may it be that others step forward to follow in his footsteps and take up his spear.

May we too speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

May we too give comfort to those in need, especially at this time of hardship.

May we too put love of country before love of self.

May we be lovers of truth, and haters of injustice, falsehood and disunity.

May we forever stand on the side of right, not for the sake of expediency, but on account of conviction.

May we, like our departed leader, regard service to our country as the highest calling, and do so with humility and courage.

Jackson Mthembu was one of our nation's heroes, one of our finest public servants and one of our greatest patriots.

I would like to thank all our health workers, doctors, nurses and other health workers who looked after Jackson Mthembu during his battle with COVID-19. You did the best you could.

I would also like to thank the staff, including the Deputy Minister Siweya in the Presidency, for all the support they gave Minister Mthembu in executing his task in service to the people of South Africa

My sister Thembi, I wish you and the children find peace in your hearts, as you go through this very difficult time. I also wish that you remain with a memory that your husband, apart from being a loving husband and father, lived his life for you and the people of South Africa. Allow his to go and rest in peace.

He has run his race

To Mvelase my good friend, farewell my dear brother, farewell my comrade and friend.

Ulala ngoxolo Mvelase!

Rest in peace.

I thank you.

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