



**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS**  
Republic of South Africa

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**A TRIBUTE BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS, HON. NN MAPISA-NQAKULA AT THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL BONGANI ISIDORE MBATHA, WATERKLOOF AIRFORCE BASE, PRETORIA, 13 MAY 2015**

**Mrs Mbatha and Family;  
Relatives and Friends of the Mbatha Family;  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers;  
Secretary of Defence;  
Chief of the South African National Defence Force;  
Directors General;  
Members of the Plenary Defence Staff Council;  
Generals, Admirals, Officers, Warrant Officers;  
Non-Commissioned Officers;  
MKVA and SANMVA;  
Fellow mourners**

**HERE LIES A SOLDIER WHO FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT.**

**Lieutenant General Bongani Isidore Mbatha is no longer with us. We knew him in Umkhonto we Sizwe as Theletso Sekgapane or simply as “Pangaman”. Here lies a man who earned every recognition he received. He was truly a man of many attributes-a true son of the soil, a principled patriot; a dedicated professional; a freedom fighter; an unsung hero; a quiet, humble, dignified and compassionate comrade. A true friend to many of us.**

**He passed away on Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2015, at 1 Military Hospital in Thaba Tshwane. He was the SANDF Chief of Logistics, having been appointed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2014. Given his congested schedule, the Commander-in-Chief of the SANDF, President Jacob Zuma, is unable to be present today on this occasion as he had so wished to be. Instead of merely tendering his apology, he requested that I stand in for him on this platform to extend his own condolences to family, friends, and**

colleagues of this gallant compatriot and fellow comrade whom he served with and came to adore personally.

The sudden passing on of Lt Gen Mbatha, our Chief of Logistics and a member of the Military Command, sent shock waves within our military community and impacted on everyone who knew him. Our sadness though will not stop us from celebrating a man well-loved everywhere where he sat his foot and a life well-lived. We find comfort in this because Gen Mbatha served his nation well, as a leader, a comrade, a patriot, a husband and as a father. Kuthiwa Aluhlanga Lungehlanga.

The recent past has been quite traumatic for our nation as death knocked and away some of our people. Within our own family in the Defence Force we also lost a serving member of the Armscor Board, Mr Fantas Mobu, while a couple of days ago we lost one of our icons, a beloved mother and military veteran, Mme Ruth Mompoti. She was truly a giant within the ranks of the African National Congress, a stalwart of the struggle for liberation, a leader and an honoured Isithalandwe. May their souls rest in peace.

Shortly before his death, we assigned Gen Mbatha some very important tasks and we knew he would be equal to what we were asking him to do. He had shown, in the execution of various responsibilities we had given him in the past that he was dedicated to his work, and displayed in no uncertain terms that he was a very meticulous planner and executor of all plans at his disposal. His honesty, integrity, and self-discipline are some of the traits which earned him respect amongst many, whilst his courage and decisiveness made some uncomfortable. His sudden death reminds us once more that we have an unfinished business-The Transformation Project. His death is incomprehensible, bizarre and raises curious questions.

We are human and therefore, we should be excused for displaying some sense of naivety in thinking that Gen Mbatha would be with us for a long period of time to help us put the South African National Defence Force on a pedestal that would be comparable with the armed forces of similar structures in the world.

Gen Mbatha was born and grew up in Alexandra. He was exposed to the struggle of our people as a student, fighting alongside other students in rejection of not only Afrikaans as a language of oppression in South

**Africa, but also against the entire policies of the apartheid regime. In his student days, he witnessed the brutality of a system that did not choose between young and old, students or workers, which left him with no choice, but to dedicate his life to the liberation of his people.**

**He was one of the groups of young people who left the country for military training in the early 1970s where his exile life together with his military life began. He joined uMkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC). During that time, he immersed himself in military life, and occupied various positions while he was in the MK camps in Angola. President Jacob Zuma paid him a glowing tribute the other day, remembering fondly the days they shared when he served under his command in Mozambique.**

**His knowledge and passion in the field of logistics saw him play a very important role in establishing logistics processes in MK. This would stand him in good stead into the future, especially in his career in our military structure after South Africa' 1994 democratic breakthrough.**

**To his wife and his entire family we can only give the same advice we also got: in times like this, though hard as it may be, we should let go and let God the giver of life finalise His processes. You were privileged to have known him to have shared his life. Let us all be proud that he did not fail us, he did not fail his people, and he did not fail his country. But, we must remember him always by protecting the signposts he erected through his good work. Many members of the SANDF have had the privilege to serve side by side with him, and others were commanded by him. It is on behalf of all of them that we salute this gallant leader and vow to pick his spear and champion the cause to which he committed himself.**

**In memory of Lt. Gen Mbatha we are bound by his conviction: that the people of this country must be the beneficiaries of the democracy he was prepared to even lay down his life for. We must not lose our capacity to remain true to ourselves and the objectives of our government. We must not allow those who do not share our ideals to disrupt our objectives. We are duty bound at all times to remind ourselves where we come from and where we want to go. We must understand and tell it as it is- about who and what- stands in our way towards the creation of the kind of South Africa for which millions of our people sacrificed everything, including their lives. These obstacles,**

wherever they may be, and whenever they may come from, even within our ranks, should be shafted and pushed aside, as we cannot continue to test the patience of our people towards a better life.

In this regard, Lt-Gen Mbatha did not need any education from anyone on such matters. He needed no one to remind him about the fundamental challenge of the democratic order to struggle for the creation of a country where everyone feels safe and secure-a country that contributes to the creation of peace and security in the continent and a better world. He did not require to be influenced about the responsibility of ensuring that this goal is primary in all that we are expected to do.

In honour of his legacy, we need to ensure that we do not allow our institutions of democracy to fall into disrepair as long as we live. His departure from among the living, his deeds whilst he lived tell us that, to honour his memory we must develop new patriots to take his place and continue to nurture his legacy. At such moments, no words should be lightly spoken. We must live what we say. As we say a fond farewell to you dear brother and comrade, inspired by your living example, we rededicate ourselves never to dishonour your memory. We will continue with all the projects you initiated with the collective leadership you were part of.

We will continue to engage in the new terrain of struggle to secure a better life for all, a project you were part of during your lifetime. This is with the primary objective of the emancipation of all the people of South Africa and contribution to peace and stability in the continent.

To our dear sister, Mrs Rosa Mbatha, the bereaved family and relatives: you are not alone at this hard time. By giving the people of South Africa, Bongani Isidore Mbatha, you resolved to give more strength to those compatriots of the forces of struggle and for freedom. Your memory remains with us.

**Hamba Kahle Qhawe lamaqhawe**

**Hamba Kahle Mbatha**

**Shandu ka Ndaba**

**Sontshangase**

**Owalima intsimi, wayilimela izinyoni zase zimbonga zathi:**

**Tshiyo, Tshiyo, Bhabha Magwaza, Ndaba Omkhulu, Ndabezitha**

**Ulale ngoXolo qabane lam**