

TRIBUTE ON THE OCCASION OF THE FUNERAL OF THE  
LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED CHRISTIAN  
DEMOCRATIC PARTY: MAVIS NTEBALENG MATLADI

I SIPHO MFUNDISI

Masters of Ceremony  
Mr Jacob Matladi and the children  
Matladi, Setou and Matlapeng families  
Hon Premier Modise  
The Rt Rev Bishops present here and  
Other religious leaders  
Members of the Executive Councils  
Their Worship Mayors  
Traditional Leaders  
Leaders of Political parties  
Traditional Healers  
Councillors  
Members of the UCDP and  
All Dearly beloved friends

We have come to pay the last respects to a distinguished and disciplined member of the United Christian Democratic Party, the departed president Mavis Matladi.

Her death reminded me of L D Raditladi's poem: Loso,. The first stanza goes as follows:

E rile ke utlwa ba re O sule  
Ka nyema moko  
Sengwe sa ultwala pelong yame  
Sa re: "Se lele ke thata ya Modimo"

I find it difficult that God with His might and love can take the life out of the 53 year old xanthippe, that Mavis was. She was such a fearless yet respectful woman. In the same poem Raditladi says death sticks to a human being with the pride of a fly, and I can't agree more in this case. Death is disrespectful. It never crossed my mind and I believe those of a good number of people in this civic centre that we could be gathered in this fashion in respect of Mavis Matladi.

It is hardly two months ago that we trudged this route of paying final tributes and respects to the late former Deputy President Paul Kgomo Ditshetelo and here we are poring over the incumbent president of the party. We may equally ask who is next and after how long?

We have come to say: *Hamba Kahle qhawe lama qhawe*, because yes Mavis was a heroine.

Mavis joined politics by accident. The events that played themselves out around this part of the country in March 1994 made her realise that while she was an academic it was neither helpful nor fruitful to stick to teaching while those in charge gave scant regard to education. It was like if she did not give up teaching and join politics to strive to find justice who else would.

Mavis was an exceptional person in that she never ceased to speak about her, husband, Jake. At almost each turn she would refer to how Jake feels about a matter. This is a rare spice in modern couples.

Even with the responsibility of keeping pace with family matters Mavis was able, for the past 12 years, to keep family and the UCDP together.

This we say because she was more often than not out of the country on business for the legislature she served.

It is not usual in politics, and particularly in political conditions of deep conflict, for somebody to be revered and loved by all. Mavis Matladi was such a person. She was held in affection by people from across the political spectrum of South Africa.

Since MmaKarabo died I have heard people remembering her in many ways. Some spoke of her courage and commitment to the improvement of the quality of life, of her humane personality, her fierce battle against domination and her tireless campaign for the emancipation of women.

Mavis has gone to join the ranks of some illustrious leaders of this party. She has gone to the world of the likes of Alina Lekgetha, Leah Tsholofelo Mangope, Gert Nkai, Kgomo Ditshetelo, Johannes Tlhaqale, Phuthogo Seleka, Trevor Tlhabane, Willie Motsatsi, S P Jood and a host of others. We hope with her in their midst they will not have problems with minute taking when they hold their celestial meeting. Surely Mavis, as the youngest of them all, will be at hand to run errands.

The gem on whose account we are gathered here has come out as the FIRST in many instances:

- She was the first woman in the UCDP to be elected Deputy Secretary of the party
- She became the first woman to be elected Secretary General of the party
- She was the first woman in the UCDP to be elected to a legislature post 1994
- She was the first woman in the party to be elected leader
- She was the first leader of the UCDP to take up her seat as substantive leader the party in the National Assembly
- She was the first South African to be elected President of the Women's caucus of the Pan African Parliament
- She happens to be the first sitting leader of a political party to be called to a better place while in parliament in this country

She is one person, who given a task, would do her utmost to present a good result. This mettle she showed while a Member of the provincial Legislature in the province. Having been assigned to serve as chair of the provincial accounts committee she swept so clean that the powers that be relieved her of her duties because *sy het te ver gegaan* to ensure that those who have to account do so.

Her commitment to the values of the UCDP came out very clearly when she resisted being poached by hovering vultures of some party during those sad days of floor crossing when opportunists who lacked the back bone would desert their parties to go to become problems elsewhere.

Mavis declined all those lucrative offers as she believed that good things happen to those who wait. She stuck to and with the UCDP as a disciplined member. In her mind rang the words of the Psalmist who said: "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Our party has lost a stalwart, one who represented the greatness of spirit that made it a great organisation. In these challenging times in the life of our party we are called upon to return to those values espoused by our party constitution. Her death may remind us to strive for unity and put the well-being of the organisation above all personal and sectarian considerations.

The time has come for us to realise that united we stand but divided we fall. Let us all unite and rid ourselves of cabals and the spirit of entitlement to party leadership; we have to accept that the latter is determined by democratic processes.

While we as a party, a nation and a continent mourn her passing away, we can pay her no better tribute than to learn from her life and to rediscover and remain true to those values that guided her life.

Our deepest sympathies go to Jake Matladi and the children. We mourn with you and share personally in your grief. We trust that you take comfort in these times of great sorrow from the knowledge that millions in our nation mourn with you and that she is remembered in nations across the continent.

Let us, this morning, re-dedicate ourselves to making the country of ours a caring and decent society to which this great South African dedicated her life and for which she sacrificed much.

Tsamaya sentle, Morokologadi, Noko, Sejabosigo!