



**EULOGY BY THE LEADER OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS AND MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MR SIBONISO DUMA, AT THE SPECIAL PROVINCIAL FUNERAL OF MR GORDON WEBSTER, GARHANE VILLAGE, MBIZANA, EASTERN CAPE, 19 AUGUST 2022**

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Our Programme Director, Dr Sibogiseni Dhlomo;  
The Children and grandchildren of Cde Gordon Webster;  
The Webster and Zuma families;  
MECs and MPLs from both KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape;  
Executive Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Cllr Vukile Mhlembana;  
Traditional Leaders, Religious Leaders, and Councillors;  
SAPS Chaplain, Rev P.L.P. Gumede;  
The Director-General of KZN, Dr Nonhlanhla Mkhize;  
Members of uMkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans;  
Ex-political Prisoners;  
Leaders of various Political Formations;  
Compatriots and Fellow Mourners;

We have come to the heart of Mpondoland, in the land King Faku, to return to the soil the mortal remains of a distinguished freedom fighter and good human being, Cde Gordon Webster.

While we are devastated, we know that to be in Mbizana we have to let history rhyme with hope because it is in this art of our land where the umbilical cords of other great stalwarts of the South African revolution were cut.

Here in the home of the historic Pondoland revolt, we have the homes of ANC President Oliver Reginald and the mother of the nation, mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

The footprints of the Khoi and the San are not only to be traced in their present day living descendants.

They are also found in the world-renowned rock art paintings in surrounding caves and mountains.

They have defied time and immortality to tell the stories of the Eland and the hunter-gathers.

They have prevailed centuries of attacks on our culture, heritage, and identity to stubbornly remind us that our history as a people predates 1652.

Till today, they whisper to those paying attention that ours is a story of hope and triumph against the violence and dehumanisation that came with slavery at the Cape, colonialism, and apartheid.

Claiming both KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape as his home, Cde Gordon Webster's momentous life is a living tributary telling us that when all is said and done, we are South Africans rooted in the nourishing and resilient African soil.

While history must rhyme with hope, it is still with heavy hearts that we today have to bid farewell to an outstanding patriot and revolutionary – Cde Gordon Webster.

It is a double blow for the family, the children, and indeed our country that today we release this quiet revolutionary to his beloved wife who transitioned to the land of our ancestors in the vehicle accident in KwaZulu-Natal that robbed our nation of these companions, parents, and comrades-in-arms.

Heart-wrenching as it is, we must release this child of our soil to the care of his departed parents, our mother, umaZuma and our father u-baba uArtie Gordon.

Hamba kahle mkhonto!

You have fought a good race!

You have completed your journey.

Beyond the grave, a warm embrace from our heroes await. Among them: our father, Derrick McBride, Ebrahim Ebrahim, Bheki Ngubane, Andrew Sibusiso Zondo, Gerald Hawkes, Portia Phila Ndwadwe and many more.

Please tell them that surviving members of the Butterfly unit, the pride of our arm struggle, will not let your sacrifices go in vain. Working with your beloved organisation, Africa's oldest glorious movement, the African National Congress, we will make sure that we restore the dignity of the people you so loved that you were prepared to lay your life for their freedom.

Today we dip our revolutionary banner of black, green, and gold to salute your contribution to the emancipation of our country from the yoke of apartheid colonialism, white supremacy, and racial division.

In your honour, we will leave no stone unturned to realise the vision of a National Democratic Society. As you did, we will marshal all our people behind the noble vision of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, equal and prosperous society.

On behalf of the Provincial Government and the people of KwaZulu-Natal, we convey our deepest sympathies to the family, friends and relatives.

Sishaye engeqiwa ntuala!

Siwumtshingo ubethwa ubani na, lihambile iqhawe lakithi!

Duduzekani nilale ngenxeba mndeni nezihlobo. Akwehlanga lungehli. Uma kunjena, siphakamisela amehlo eth ku Jehova, umqali nomphelelisi wokholo lwethu. Liyasho izwi ukuthi uhlala eseduze nezinhliziyi zabadabukileyo. Siyamethemba, uzowabopha amanxeba.

To the grandchildren and children of Cde Gordon Webster: Jennifer, Brian, Samantha and Gary, please receive our heartfelt sympathies on losing your mother and father in such a tragic manner.

We hope that the fond memories you have of your beloved parents will spare you unending sorrow.

A good man like your father would want to see you overcome this setback and be in charge of your lives and destiny again.

Fellow mourners,

Since the passing away of Cde Gordon Webster, we have felt the outpouring of love from many quarters and from those who knew him intimately.

From all the tributes we have heard, including today, it is clear that among us lived a man filled only with the unrelenting spirit of love for humankind.

He was the very epitome of love, reminding us of Che Guevara's dictum that, "***the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality***".

In his youth, this good man was driven by a deep love for the poor and the oppressed. It explains why he chose to change his society by choosing the mother of all vocations, teaching.

Teaching remains a noble calling for the selfless among us who wish to transform society by impacting the youth.

When he embarked on this journey in the eighties, it was clear that the racist regime had sought to use segregated education as a toll for subjugation, division, and cheap black labour.

The eighties was the era of "the comrades" led mainly by young activists in our townships, who like the 76 generation, decided to confront the brutality of apartheid head-on.

It was South Africa's militant and courageous youth that was the first to positively respond to O R Tambo's call of rendering South Africa ungovernable on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1985 resulting in Botha declaring a state of emergency.

Having grown up in a family that taught him to value human solidarity, ubuntu, and human dignity, Cde Webster grew up knowing that everybody was somebody and that apartheid was evil and against the wishes of God.

It is here in the Eastern Cape that we learn of moving and inspiring stories of our Coloured community which embraces Mpondo and Xhosa traditions including the ancient tradition of ukwaluka and associated rituals. IsiXhosa is a language spoken with much ease by different communities. Kuyathethwa apha.

Like a number of outstanding activists in the Coloured and Indian community, Cde Webster would not allow himself to be hoodwinked by the sham and façade of PW Botha's Tricameral Parliament in the eighties.

While others embraced it and collaborated with the enemy, Cde Webster realised that this was another ploy by the evil apartheid regime to drive a wedge between the oppressed. It was clear for the young Cde Webster that this was another divide-and-rule strategy that had to be resisted.

Those who have written about him attest that Botha's Tricameral Parliament must have been one of the important motivations for him to take the decision to pick up arms to fight this diabolic system that would otherwise have sought to alienate him from all his roots – be they Zulu, Mpondo, or Irish.

Cde Webster fully embraced his black experience and the alienation of his people in the land of their birth.

In a colonised country that grounded and premised everything on race, he saw himself very much like our father, Walter 'Xhamela' Sisulu, who born from an African woman at Engcobo and a white man asserted that:

***I am a black man, I am an African. I am subject to all the laws that affect my people...I never wanted to see my skin colour determine my race. I was an African in every sense of the word. No less, no more"***

It is exactly this definition and affirmation of our being which finds resonance in the poetic vision of the National Development Plan. It says:

***"Who are we?***

***We are Africans.***

***We are an African country.***

***We are part of our multi-national region.***

***We are an essential part of our continent.***

***Being Africans, we are acutely aware of the wider world, deeply implicated in our past and present.***

***That wider world carries some of our inheritance."***

To assert his humanity and identity as an African and a black man who shared in the pain, struggles, and triumphs of his people, Cde Gordon Webster was willing and prepared to pay the ultimate price for freedom.

He was ready to sacrifice limb and life to free his country from national oppression and to contribute to the vision of a South Africa that belongs to all, black and white.

Known for his humility and quietness, he left the country quietly to join uMkhonto we Sizwe in exile.

Like the MK at its formation, he swore allegiance to the Freedom Charter and took the oath that MK guerrillas and combatants took on 16 December 1961 where they said:

***"The time comes in the life of any people when there remain two choices: to submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We will not submit but will fight back with all means at our disposal in defence of our rights, our people and our freedom."***

On his return from exile, Cde Webster recruited many youths to join the ranks of the people's liberation army. Cde Robert McBride, tells the story of their friendship and comradeship better than many of us. It was Cde Webster who recruited him to Umkhonto we Sizwe and Cde McBride speak glowingly of how he looked up to him because of his discipline and the seriousness he attached to the liberation struggle.

It is probably a tragedy that many South Africans, our youth in particular, did not hear from Cde Webster himself how he was rescued from Edenvale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg by Cde McBride, his late father Cde Derrick McBride and others.

This is an inspiring story of how South Africans from all walks of life, including nurses and general staff at Edenvale Hospital were significant actors in their own right in the liberation of our country.

Given his modest and selfless character, Cde Webster avoided the limelight or claiming any credit in the collective struggle in which he was but an actor.

While he was a protagonist in the theatre of struggle even being imprisoned on Robben Island, Cde Webster chose to remain in the background and so, very few people knew about him or his monumental contribution to our liberation struggle.

Having been trained in security, intelligence, and combat, the brave, quiet, and courageous Cde Webster understood the enormity of the task that came with freedom in 1994.

He must have been preoccupied with the wellbeing and security of the state knowing too well that the widening gap between the rich and the poor was a security threat to our new nation.

When he saw how the youth that he cherished was being consumed by crime, drugs, alcohol and other social ills, the teacher and soldier in him must have been pained. He sure was worried that youth unemployment was a ticking time bomb that would undermine the gains of our democracy.

When he saw comrades stealing resources meant for the poor or bringing the ANC into disrepute, he must have thought that this would be utilised by our enemies to undermine the hegemony and legitimacy of the ANC as leader of society.

If he was concerned, he only confided in his close and trusted comrades. He could never go out in the public and attack the organisation he so cherished.

We thank him for leading by example, for teaching us about humility, care for the poor, and for not desecrating on the flag of the ANC and our country.

In him, we had a man who loved his wife and cherished his children. He teaches us that despite the challenges of the day, we still have a duty to rebuild the African family which was systematically destroyed by colonialism, apartheid, and the migrant labour system.

One of his children was recently cited saying that she believes her father was truly happy as he shun public life and spent time with them. Such a testimony brings tears of contentment to our eyes because we know that Cde Webster in his youth faced brute violence that was unleashed by the state. He lost friends and comrades in the crucible of struggle. If at the end of his life, he found joy from his family, we share in their joy and thank them for gifting our nation this quiet and outstanding hero of our revolution.

Cde Webster spent his youth fighting an enemy armed to teeth and survived to contribute to peace, reconciliation, and the building of a new South Africa. It is truly tragic that his life and that of his beloved wife had to be brutally cut in a road accident.

His departure reminds us again about the fragility of life.

It is also a sharp reminder about the work we need to do as a country to end the pain of families that result from the carnage and deaths on our roads.

As we bid him farewell, let us all play our part in improving road safety.

To pay forward his sacrifices, let us defeat the counterrevolution, root out corruption, and unite our people.

Cde Webster picked up arms so that there is justice and peace for the children and women of our land. In his honour, we must eradicate the culture of violence, improve the delivery of services, and ensure that there is hope and a place under the sun for the children of the poor.

We can say he is resting in peace when we have banished hunger in our land and fully restored the dignity of the people he so loved.

We can say he has a good report to give to our departed martyrs if he will tell them that the ANC is renewing itself, that it is restoring its revolutionary character, is still committed to its non-racial character, and that it is on course to restore the wealth of our country to all South Africans.

In conclusion, please allow me to dedicate an extract to this fallen warrior from a poem titled "My Life is in a Hurry", by the Brazilian poet, Mário de Andrade:

***My time is too short for being preoccupied with titles.***

***I want the essence; my soul is in a hurry!***

***I want to live next to humans, ...the real people.***

***Who know how to laugh at their mistakes.***

***Who don't get puffed up by their own success.***

***Who do not consider themselves elected before their time.***

***Who take responsibility for their actions.***

***In this way, human dignity is defended***

***And we live in truth and honesty.***

***The bottom line is what makes life worth living.***

***I want to surround myself with people who know how to touch the hearts of those whom hard strokes of life have learned to grow with sweet touches of the soul.***

***Yes...***

***I am in a hurry... – to live with the intensity that only maturity can give.***

***My goal is to reach the end satisfied and at peace with my loved ones and my conscience.***

***We have two lives, and the second one begins when you realise that you only have one.***

Let us pick his spear and march forward together to a South Africa that is at peace with itself and the world.

Once again, condolences to the family.

I thank you!